

Landscaping: Patios, Paths and Walkways

by Valerie Rose

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Patios, paths and walkways: pleasure and practicality

“One of the most delightful things about a garden is the anticipation it provides.” ~W.E. Johns, *The Passing Show*

Anticipation... winter weather is certainly better for dreaming and planning the garden than mucking around outside. Many gardeners actually relish winter's cold, gray days: a mug of steaming tea/coffee/toddy, a comfy chair and plenty of seed catalogues to peruse. What a cozy way to select this year's heirloom vegetables, choose new native perennials, and design raised beds to replace that useless lawn. The garden grows and changes in your mind as you anticipate changing and rearranging the landscape.

But it's not just about the plants. Winter is also the best time of year to plan patios, paths and walkways, and other 'hardscape' elements of your garden. “It's a terrific time to plan a renovation or possibly design a new area for plants, or a place for people, or both” notes landscape designer Dawn Chaplin.



Natural stone, concrete pavers, landscape blocks and gravel are only a few of many materials gardeners can use in a hardscaping project. **Photo courtesy of Dawn Chaplin.**

The rainy season brings our attention to the places where water goes, and stops. “Take this opportunity to walk around your garden to see where water is pooling,” Chaplin advises. “Drainage needs can be more easily assessed at this time. Gardeners should think about their goals for specific problem areas. Do they want to create a raised gravel walkway in an area where the grass path has become muddy and slippery? Would a particularly soggy spot benefit by being raised with a low rock retaining wall? Or would they prefer to re-design the area as a bog garden, or replant it with species that can tolerate wet feet?”

Exploring such questions is important to Chaplin as she works with clients. She has created plans for residential landscapes in Skagit and Island counties, through her Conway-based business, DLC Design/Landscape Design & Horticultural Consultation. Chaplin is generously sharing her knowledge at this month's Master Gardener Know and Grow workshop (see infobox for details.)

Stone, Metal, Wood or ???

A profusion of materials are available for hardscaping projects. Chaplin says this will be an important part of her workshop. “I will review some pros and cons of a variety of materials including natural stone, concrete pavers and paving slabs, landscape stones and blocks as well as gravel.”

These materials can be used to create hardscape features such as patios, walls and walkways. When considering a hardscape design, remember these elements can serve many purposes. “A walkway should be functional and inviting,” notes Chaplin. It can visually tie together disparate areas of the garden, while providing an attractive replacement for a mucky path connecting mud puddles.

A well-designed walkway adds pleasure comfort and focus to a ramble through the garden. And when it’s time to sit and enjoy the view? Hardscaping designs can include benches or a patio. “A patio should be large enough for a dining or picnic table,” Chaplin says. Some gardeners may wish to incorporate a smaller seating area with a bench and chairs. The patio may also connect different garden areas. “If it is also to be used as a thoroughfare, it may be helpful to make it larger, to allow for the passage of people without needing to move the furniture.”

Finding Inspiration

A gardener planning a hardscape project has so many choices: materials, colors, layout, patterns – and that’s not even counting the plants! Chaplin recommends gathering inspiration by traveling, taking photographs and notes. “One of the best ways to learn about garden design and plants is by visiting private and public gardens locally. You can also join organized tours of gardens in the Pacific Northwest, nationally and beyond, if possible.” A garden tour is a great gift for a gardening friend or relative. And it’s a great excuse – I mean reason - to travel and explore how other gardeners have used hardscaping to shape their communities of plants.

Chaplin encourages everyone to ask about what they observe in others’ gardens. “Don’t be afraid to talk with other gardeners about their gardens. Most are happy to answer questions about a particular plant, patio or walkway material, and will share information on what has worked well for them (and not so well).”



A stone path surrounded by groundcover and lined on both sides with low hedges of boxwood. **Photo courtesy of Dawn Chaplin.**

What: Skagit County Master Gardener *Know & Grow Workshop* on:
'The Pleasure and Practicality of Patios, Paths and Walkways'
Instructor: Dawn Chaplin of DLC Design/Landscape Design & Horticultural
Consultation
When: Tuesday, February 15th
Time: 1 – 2:30pm
Where: WSU Mt.Vernon Northwestern Washington Research & Extension Ctr.
16650 State Route 536 (Memorial Highway)
More Info: Call WSU Skagit County Extension at 360-428-4270, ext. 0

Sustainability and Hardscape Materials

(from '*Hardscapes for Sustainable Landscapes*,' OSU Extension)

Reduce, reuse, recycle

Use fewer 'virgin' materials in your landscape. Reuse existing materials when possible, or select recycled products. A number of new recycled landscape products are available in a variety of textures and colors. Many combine recycled plastics with wood by-products. These materials require almost no maintenance and last longer than wood. They can be used for decks, fences, benches, and planters.

Environmental impact

Hardscape materials vary in their effect on the environment. For example, pavement prevents water from soaking into the soil, thus increasing runoff, which can carry contaminants into streams. Porous materials, on the other hand, allow water to soak into the soil.

RESOURCES:

- 'Hardscapes for Sustainable Landscapes: Patios, Decks, Walkways, and Driveways,' A.M. VanDerZanden , OSU Extension:
<http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/19604/ec1535.pdf>
- 'Hardscape in the Landscape,' Penn State Cooperative Extension:
<http://adams.extension.psu.edu/Horticulture/MGarticles/Hardscape.html>
- 'A Garden Gallery: The Plants, Art, and Hardscape of Little and Lewis,' by George Little and David Lewis, Timber Press, Portland, 2005
- 'Homescaping: Designing Your Land to Match Your Home,' Anne Halpin, Rodale Press, Emmaus, 2005

Magazines (many available at Skagit County's libraries):

- *Garden Gate*: no ads, lots of inspiration: www.gardengatemagazine.com
- *Garden Design*: www.gardendesign.com